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What is a FAITH MISSION?

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BY THE I.F.M.A.

The Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America was founded in 1917 as a fellowship of foreign missionary societies without denominational affiliation. Relying upon God through faith and prayer for the provision of their needs, they seek to present a strong, united testimony for the complete and speedy evangelization of the world. Over 4,500 missionaries serve under its Member Missions in all major fields of the world.

Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association

Founded in 1917

1860 BROADWAY NEW YORK 23, N.Y.

What is a Faith Mission?

The name "Faith Mission" was not chosen or assumed by the Missions which have come to be so designated. Rather, it was given them by others, largely because of their distinctive policy and practice regarding financial support and because the Missions so called were without denominational affiliation. Furthermore, nothing is more remote from the mind of such Missions than that they have any monopoly upon faith, or that they necessarily exhibit any greater faith than Missions of a different order. Keenly conscious oftentimes of the lack or frailty of their own faith, they simply take humbly the position of looking to God alone for the financial and all other needs of their Christ-appointed tasks.

It is generally understood that the Faith Mission movement as such began with the China Inland Mission in 1865, but it was not long before this new type of Missionary undertaking began to be duplicated in fields other than China, and thus one after another, these new missionary enterprises were launched in other parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Their founders or leaders were men with a vision and passion for lost multitudes. Almost without exception they

contacted existing missionary societies but the societies were unwilling or unable to launch out into new ventures. Most missionary work was confined to coastal areas or large cities and there seemed to be little desire to venture into the interior of jungle, mountain or desert with the Gospel. The list of such Societies working in foreign lands has now grown to possibly more than three score in number.

While these have no organic relation one to another, each being a separate entity, and while as to their organization and administration and even their financial methods, there are differences in detail, yet, in the main, they are patterned along the same lines and, as a group, have come to be spoken of as "Faith Missions." For purposes of spiritual fellowship, prayer and conference over common problems, and mutual helpfulness in every practicable way, a number of these Societies in North America are now linked together in a fraternal union founded in 1917 and known as the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association of North America.

What are some of the distinctive convictions which these so-called Faith Missions hold in common?

SUPPORT

As to financial support, they look to the Lord in faith and prayer for the supply of the means

to carry on their work. They do not go into debt to maintain their ministry. Their workers are not guaranteed fixed salaries but all unite as a family in trusting God for their temporal needs and accepting what He is pleased to send them through the voluntary gifts of His people, believing that what God supplies is accepted as His estimate of the need.

DOCTRINE

As to doctrinal position, firm insistence is laid upon sound evangelical belief. No worker is accepted or retained who does not unequivocally hold all the great cardinal truths of the historic Christian faith with reference to the Bible, the person and work of Christ, the lost condition of man and his need of spiritual regeneration. These Faith Missions firmly hold that the old Gospel is the only Gospel, and they are absolutely opposed to "modernism" in any degree. Workers from most of the Protestant denominations, sound in the faith and trained in evangelical schools, constitute normally the body of missionaries.

METHOD

As to missionary method, Faith Missions unite in the conviction that the terms of our Lord's Great Commission make the preaching of the Gospel the primary and central task of missions.

for all time. Christ's command was: "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature"; "Go . . . disciple all nations"; "Ye shall be My witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth." Earlier "He ordained twelve . . . that He might send them forth to preach." His great missionary apostle, Paul, testified, "Christ sent me . . . to preach the Gospel," and added that "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." In accord with these instructions, direct and aggressive evangelism was the engrossing task of Paul and all the other missionaries of the New Testament period, combined with the organization of the converts into local church groups and their spiritual instruction and cultivation, to the end that they in turn might carry forward the work of Gospel witnessing not only in their own communities but into "the regions beyond." And such was the divine blessing upon this policy and program that the results of that first generation of missionary effort exceeded proportionately those of any succeeding generation.

In the face of the disposition today in some missionary circles to disparage and discard evangelism in favor of a more popular program of social science, higher education, and other things, we boldly assert that the substitution of any other policy or program of work has signally failed in

achieving anything like equal returns for the energy and money expended.

Critics have claimed that the evangelistic policy of Faith Missions does not make for the effecting of a strong and enduring structure for the future, as does work along educational and community service lines. On this point we must emphatically differ with our critics. We are strongly convinced that the truest criterion of a missionary's success, judged by the test of time, is the degree in which his efforts are the means of producing truly regenerated men and women who, united together in indigenous churches, will propagate their faith, win others to Christ, and exert a vital and ever-increasing spiritual and moral influence in the community and the nation. We fully recognize the social, industrial, political, and all other implications of the Gospel. And as for the term, "applied Christianity," so much upon the lips of champions of social service, we are of the opinion that any Christianity which does not find practical expression in daily life is not the real article but only a spurious imitation. The Gospel which every evangelical missionary preaches is something that proves its power by making those who embrace it better men and women, whether as sons and daughters or parents, as workmen or employers, as citizens or rulers of the State. Nor do we know of any

other potent means of lifting society to a higher and purer level, and of making human relationships what they ought to be, apart from the winning of individuals through this Gospel to a new life in Christ the Saviour.

POLICY

As to missionary policy, stress is ever laid by Faith Missions upon wholly unoccupied fields and unreached areas in fields already entered. They believe that the prime objective in missions is the evangelization of all men, rather than the conversion of any one favored section or the education of any one preferred class. As set forth in the account given in Acts 15 of that first missionary conference of the Christian Church, convened at Jerusalem, God is in this period of time—from Christ's ascension to His Second Coming—"visiting the Gentile nations, to take out of them a people for His Name." The foremost ambition of the missionary today should therefore be what Paul's ambition was in his day, "to preach the Gospel not where Christ was named" (Romans 15:20), or "in the regions beyond" (II Cor. 10:16), inspired by the hope of reaching the last unevangelized region and tribe on earth, and winning the last souls to complete the Church, or "ecclesia" (called-out company), for which the Lord will return.

While much more could be written about the

so-called Faith Missions, enough has perhaps been said to set forth their more distinctive common features. It may be well, however, to add a few words about the question of missionary reinforcements at times of grave economic depression such as that which struck the Western world in 1929 and continued on for quite a few years.

In the case of most Mission Boards, very few if any new workers were sent out during that period, owing to the serious effect of the financial situation upon missionary revenue. This was perhaps the only logical and consistent course for administrative Boards appointed by and responsible to certain stated constituencies, and operating on the basis of an estimated annual revenue from fixed sources such as invested funds, assessment of churches, and the like.

But the case of the "Faith Missions" is quite different. They have back of them no such stated constituencies, nor is their work administered upon a budget basis of estimated income and outlay. They began their respective projects under a compelling sense of a divine call and commission to evangelize certain countries or areas such as their names indicate. In thus obeying the Great Commission, they have ever looked in simple faith to the Lord Who gave it, for the means to carry on. They have gone forward only as He supplied the needs, care-

fully avoiding debt and never borrowing money. But, on the other hand, they have never concluded that their continuance or advance need be gauged by prevailing financial conditions. If God wants a certain work done, He is surely well able to provide the necessary means, whether little or much, and in time of prevailing plenty of stringency alike. If and when the work in hand demands reinforcements for its effective advance and completion, and offers of service come from those who give clear evidence, after thorough and prayerful consideration, of being called and fitted of God for such work, then would it not be contradictory to the very principle of faith upon which these Missions were founded to decide to decline such applicants from fear or misgiving as to whether financial supplies will continue sufficient? Rather has their policy and procedure been to accept such approved new recruits, and to look to the Lord with them in prayer and faith for the provision of the necessary funds as a seal of His approval.

Since the great economic depression of 1929, Faith Missions have, without curtailing the support of existing work and workers, made the most marked advance and development in the whole history of foreign missionary work, until today the great portion of the foreign mission-

ary enterprise is borne by these Faith Mission Boards.

It is with a spirit deeply humbled by an overwhelming sense of the Lord's exceeding grace and goodness that this testimony has been given. He has condescended to use these most imperfect and unworthy agencies in some measure to carry out His purposes and to show forth His faithfulness and power. May He be pleased to use what has been here written to call forth more prayer both for these Missions and also for all others that are striving to obey the Great Commission by taking the Gospel of salvation to all those for whom the Saviour died!

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